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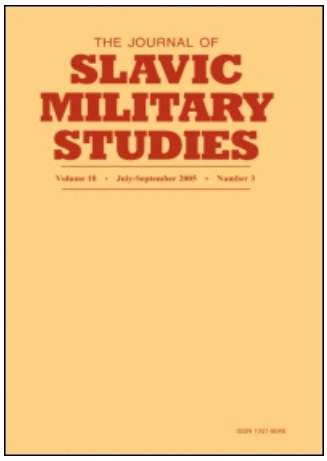

The Journal of Slavic Military Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713636668

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To cite this Article: Rein, Leonid , '**Untermenschen** in SS Uniforms: 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of Waffen SS', The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 20:2, 329 - 345
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/13518040701378360
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13518040701378360

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Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 20: 329–345, 2007
Copyright © Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
ISSN 1351-8046 print
DOI: 10.1080/13518040701378360

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UNTERMENSCHEN IN SS UNIFORMS: 30TH WAFFEN-GRENADIER DIVISION OF WAFFEN SS

Leonid Rein

The article deals with the so-called 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS known also as Russian No. 2. This division consisted of former armed collaborators who had left Byelorussia in the summer of 1944 together with Germans. The article not only depicts the fighting activities of the division at the western front at the second half of 1944 but also reconstructs as far as possible the inner atmosphere in this unit and the relations between German personnel and Byelorussian "Waffen-Grenadiers." The admitting of those who only a couple years ago were seen as "subhuman" into the rows of Waffen-SS did not mean the disappearance of anti-Slavic stereotypes on the part of Germans. Rather, the attitude on the part of the latter toward their new "comrades-in-arms" remained till the very end the mixture of racial dogmatism and utilitarianism.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the present article is one of the less known units that took part in battles of the World War II, namely 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS. This unit was formed in late summer–fall 1944, after the German retreat from Byelorussia and consisted of former Byelorussian collaborators, members of various military-police formations created by Germans during an occupation. Actually, the history of this division represents the last chapter in the history of Byelorussian collaboration during World War II.

The aim of the present article is not only to provide the general picture of the division and to reconstruct the relations inside this unit, but also to

Leonid Rein received his Ph.D. at Haifa University with the dissertation on local collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II. The Book *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia and its Place in German Occupying Policies (1941–1944)* is currently in the publishing process. The publications include: Local Collaboration in the Execution of 'Final Solution' in Nazi–occupied Byelorussia, published at *Holocaust and Geneocide Studies,* 20(3), Winter 2006; The Orthodox Church in Byelorussia under Nazi occupation (1941–1944), published at *East European Quarterly,* 39 (1), 2005.

Address correspondence to Leonid Rein, Haifa University, Herzel Str., 86a, 33216, Haifa, Israel. E-mail: reinleonid@gmail.com

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check how far the history of this division reflects the attitude of German authorities toward the native collaboration in the East during World War II. Since the history of 30th Waffen Grenadier Division of SS is connected closely to the general history of armed collaboration in Byelorussia, it is worth describing shortly the process preceding the formation of this unit.

In summer 1944, as a result of a Soviet military operation named after the Russian General, the hero of the Napoleonic Wars, Pjotr Bagration, German troops left Byelorussia. The so-called "General Commissariat for White Ruthenia" (*Generalkommissariat für Weißruthenien*), created in September 1941 and in April 1944 on Hitler's personal order, detached from the Reich's Commissariat for Ostland,[1] ceased to exist. Three years of German occupation in Byelorussia were characterized by ignoring the reality in favor of ideological chimeras, by excessive brutality and violence as well as by the power struggles and rivalries inside the occupying apparatus. The results of these three years (1941–1944) were truly devastating. Some two millions Byelorussian inhabitants perished,[2] between

[1]This included also three Baltic countries, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

[2]It is very difficult to establish exactly the human losses in Byelorussia during the period of Nazi occupation. In the Soviet period the standard suggestion said that every fourth Byelorussian dweller perished. After the Second World War for more than 50 years the number of 2,200,000 people killed in Byelorussia was taken for granted (see e.g. I. Kravchenko, "Nemecko-Fashistskij okkupacionnyj Rezhim v Bjelorussii" in Y. Boltin et al. (eds.), *Nemetsko-Fashistskij Okkupatsionnyj Rezhim* (1941–1944), (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoj Literatury, 1965), p.63). This number included 1,409,225 "peaceful inhabitants" and 810,091 Soviet prisoners-of war (POWs), not all of the latter lived in Byelorussia before the war. Mainly from propagandistic reasons the number 2.2. million was taken for granted. Only in the last decade these numbers, that appeared originally in the report of the "Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of German-Fascist occupants" from the year 1944 were somewhat revised by the historians both in Byelorussia itself and outside of her. So in the collection *Belarus v XX Veke* (Belarus in the 20th century) that appeared in Minsk 2000 the Byelorussian historian Alexej Litvin assumed the number of the losses of Byelorussian population as being between 1.95 thousand and 2 million people. According to Litvin this number includes Byelorussians perished in Byelorussian territory, at the front as well as during the forced work in Germany. Hereby the author takes into consideration the fact that the census carried out in Byelorussia in 1939, after the annexation of western areas was falsified and 2.9 million people were simply added out of the blue sky. See: A. Litvin, "K Voprosu o Kolichestve lyudskikh Poter' Belarusi v Gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojny (1941–1945 gg.)," Ya. Basin (ed.), *Belarus v XX Veke*, 1st edition, (Minsk, 2000), pp.136–137. In the 2002 edition of the study *Zhertvy Dvukh Diktatur* dealing with the tragic fate of Soviet forced workers in the Third Reich, Russian historian Pavel Poljan quoted the summary report of the Extraordinary Commission dated March 1, 1946. The report detailed the losses in Byelorussia for each of the 12 oblasts existed at the time (after the war Soviet Union transferred to Poland large part of prewar Bialystok oblast as well as three rayons of the Brest oblast. The remnants of the Bialystok oblast were renamed Grodno oblast). In this report 1,360,034 people were listed under the rubric "killed, tormented peaceful citizens." This number accounted to 22,4 % of the total Byelorussian population. See: P. Poljan, *Zhertvy Dvukh Diktatur* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), pp. 11, 737.

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quarter million and one million of them Jews;[3] about three million people remained homeless.[4]

The brutality of German occupation policies led to the expansion of resistance movement. The partisan movement in Byelorussia, which in summer 1941 represented no more than assembly of poorly armed, poorly supplied and poorly disciplined bands of Red Army soldiers, who lost contact with their units, concentrating themselves upon raiding the surrounding villages rather than upon fighting Germans, already one year later became a mighty factor in occupied Byelorussia, armed and controlled directly from Moscow. Since approximately mid-1942 this movement received a steady influx of all those who felt themselves threaten by the occupying authorities: potential forced workers, Red Army soldiers, Jews, etc. This movement had a big impact upon creation and expanding of various Byelorussian collaborationist bodies, in the first place of armed ones.

With the drastic expansion of partisan movement, it became clear that Germans have neither enough forces nor enough experience to effectively combat this movement. Although Hitler in his famous July 1941 monologue regarding "the aims of the war against the Soviet Union" maintained that "only German should bear arms, not a Slave, not a Czech, not a Cossack or a Ukrainian!,"[5] it went out that in reality there were not enough "arms-bearing Germans" to secure "tranquility and order" in the occupied Soviet territories. Therefore, both Cossacks and Ukrainians and even so-called "Asians," who at the beginning of Nazi occupation together with Jews were transferred to the shooting squads, were allowed to serve as armed auxiliaries. Hitler's decision to shift the main throw in the war against Soviet Union in 1942 to the south robbed the German Army Group "Center" of troops much needed both for the front-fighting and for securing the rear. Already in May 1942 commander of the Rear Area of Army Group "Center" General of Infantry, Max von Schenckendorff, complained that effective combating of partisans is impossible due to insufficient troops and demanded return of the units transferred to Army Group "South".[6]

This demand became without an answer and thus already in spring 1942 the formation of anti-partisan units from Soviet POWs and civilian population has began. Already in September 1942 eight so-called "combat

[3]See: L. Smilowitsky, "Die Partizipation der Juden am Leben der Belorussischen Sozialistischen Sowjetrepublik (BSSR) im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt, 1944–1954," in Projektgruppe Belarus (Hrsg.), *"Existiert das Ghetto noch?"* (Berlin et al.: Assoziation A 2003), p. 277.

[4]Ch. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 1999), p. 11.

[5]"Aktenvermerk vom 16. Juli 1941 über eine Besprechung Hitlers mit Rosenberg, Lammers, Keitel und Göring", Document 221-L, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (*IMT*) (Nuremberg 1947–1948), vol. XXXVIII, p. 88.

[6]"Beurteilung der Lage im Heeresgebiet Mitte, 31.5.42", Federal Archives-Military Archives (*Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv*) (Freiburg i. Br.), (*BA-MA*) RH 22/231, sheets 193, 270.

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battalions" recruited from the Soviet prisoners-of-war acted against the partisans in eastern Byelorussia. Later more anti-partisan units of various size consisting primarily from the POWs were either formed in Byelorussia or transferred there. According to the Byelorussian historian Alexej Litvin already in April 1943 some 43 anti-partisan units of various size operated in Rear Area of Army Group "Center" (i.e., primarily in eastern Byelorussia).[7]

In addition, in western Byelorussia (at the territory of *Generalkommissariat für Weißruthenien*) a number of the so-called auxiliary police battalions (*Schutzmannschafts-Bataillonen*) acted. These were subordinated to the High SS and Police Leader "Central Russia and White Ruthenia".[8] These battalions participated actively not only in "anti-partisan combat", but also in the murder of Byelorussian Jews.[9] Except for Byelorussian schuma-battalions a number of Ukrainian and Baltic battalions were transferred to Byelorussia. In addition in spring the formation of *Schutzmannschaft* battalions consisting of refugees from the North Caucasus and Cossacks, who after German retreat from the North Caucasus and South Russia arrived in Byelorussia, has began. There were formed two Caucasian schuma-battalions and three Cossack cavalry units.[10]

In February 1944, when Soviet Army stood at the gates of Byelorussia, the acting General Commissar for White Ruthenia, Curt von Gottberg,[11] who was also High SS and Police Leader of "Central Russia and White Ruthenia," ordered creation of "Byelorussian Home Guard" (*Belaruskaja Krajova Abarona* or *BKA* in Byelorussian). The recruitment into this body was limited to the territory of General Commissariat White Ruthenia, whereby the territories with mostly Polish population, such as Lida were excluded from the recruitment campaign. According to Alexej Litvin totally 39 infantry and 6 pioneer battalions were formed, although not all of them were of battalion size.[12]

The attitude of the German occupying authorities toward all these collaboration bodies was characterized from the beginning to the end by mistrust, by ideological dogmatism and by a striving to win a local collaboration for possibly lowest price. At the time when Soviet authorities

[7]A. Litvin, "Beloruskaja Krajovaja Oborona" in idem (ed.), *Akupacyja Belarusi (1941–1944). Pytanni Supracivu i Kalabaracyi* (Minsk: Belaruski Knigazbor, 2000), p. 179.

[8]According to German military historian Rolf Michaelis, 118 such battalions were at the disposal of HSSPL "Central Russia and White Ruthenia" until summer 1944. See: R. Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, (Berlin: Michaelis-Verlag 2002), p. 64.

[9]To the theme of the participation of local police units in the Holocaust in Byelorussia see: Yehoshua Büchler, "Local Police Force Participation in the Extermination of Jews in occupied Soviet Territory 1941–1942", *Shvut*, 4(20) 1996, pp. 79–99; Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 2000)

[10]Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 66.

[11]Von Gottberg succeeded in this office Wilhelm Kube, who was killed by the resistance in September 1943.

[12]Litvin, "Beloruskaja Krajovaja Oborona", p. 187.

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invested heavily (including a supply with the most modern weapons) into the partisan movement, the units that were supposed to combat this movement were poorly equipped for the task. Even in spring 1943, 10% of all local auxiliary policemen in General Commissariat White Ruthenia did not have the basic firearms[13] and this at the time when some of the partisan units had at their disposal antiaircraft and antitank artillery and even tanks.

The supply with uniforms too proceeded very slowly. This can be ascribed to the general supply problems, but the closer analysis of the sources shows that racially-ideological factors to a significant extent were at play too. German authorities were literally obsessed with a thought that armed Eastern collaborators would one day turn their weapons against Germans. The mutinies of the so-called "Druzhina"[14] (August 1942) and inside the combat battalion "Beresina" (September of the same year)[15] in the course of which Germans were killed only strengthened these anxieties. They expressed themselves in a number of orders. Thus, in February 1942 von Schenckendorff issued an order forbidding arming of local auxiliary police units with machineguns, while in October of the same year the same Schenckendorff has prohibited to supply local units appointed to secure the railroad lines with automatic weapons and special devices.[16]

It was a vicious circle: The lack of weapons in comparison to ever improving armament of partisan units lowered the moral of the members of local anti-partisan units and encouraged the mutinous tendencies. These tendencies in their turn strengthened the mistrust of German authorities toward the local collaborators and hampered their equipment.

[13]"Oberst Klepsch über die Schutzmannschaften: Protokoll der Tagung der GKW Funktionären, 8.4–10.4.43", Federal Archives, Berlin) (*BA*), R 93/20, Bl. 153.Colonel Klepsch was commander of German order police in Generalcommissariat White Ruthenia.

[14]The SS "Druzhina" (the name means the princely guard in ancient Russia) was part of the so-called Zeppelin-Project, in which frameworks the potential saboteurs, who were supposed to operate behind the Soviet lines, were trained. The participants in this project were used also for "anti-partisan combat." On August 13, 1942 "Druzhina" was surrounded by the partisans. The unit's commander Rodionov and many other unit's members shot down German framework personnel and other soldiers who did not want to join them and ran over to the partisans. Soviet authorities awarded Rodionov an order and renamed his unit "1st antifascist partisan brigade". See for example: S. Steeberg, *Vlasov* (New York: Knopf 1970), pp. 108–109.

[15]On September 18, 1942, during a combined anti-partisan raid to the south east of Bobrujsk (eastern Byelorussia) soldiers of 2nd company of the "Beresina" battalion shot down three members of German secret field police and two local auxiliary policemen and ran over to the partisans. See: "Bericht des Leitenden Feldpolizeidirektors b. d. Sich. Div. 203 betreffend Meuterei der 2. Komp. des Batl. Beresina und Ermordung von 3 Angehörigen der GFP Gruppe 707, 29.9.42", *BA-MA* RH 22/233, sheet 213.

[16]Einsatz von Ukrainern und OD-Leute: Merkblatt Schenckendorffs für Streckensicherung und Bahnschutz, 19.10.42", *BA-MA* RH 22/233.

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FORMATION OF 30TH WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION OF SS

Not all of those who collaborated with Germans during the occupation period were able to leave Byelorussia in the face of advancing Soviet forces and not all of them wanted to do so. Generally German retreat from Byelorussia in summer 1944 was anything but "orderly." For many German functionaries the retreat itself came as an unpleasant surprise. For example the city commissar (*Stadtskommissar*) of Minsk, Johan Ewald Becher, was assured "repeatedly" by the German military authorities as lately as at the beginning of summer 1944, that "the center (i.e., the central front section-L.R.) not only would be held, but it would serve, moreover, already this year as a basis for German throw against Moscow and that an offensive from it all the way to Urals is possible and should be expected."[17] It must be remembered that such assurances came when eastern Byelorussia was already liberated from Germans.

In many places the retreat developed itself into a panic flight, whereas German functionaries strove to save their booty and to disappear as quickly as possible. Regarding the people who collaborated with Germans, these were often abandoned to their fate. Practically no measures were undertaken for their evacuation to the West. In this respect the case of "Byelorussian Home Guard" is revealing indeed. Although originally it was planned to issue an order for general retreat of Home Guard units to the West at the end such an order has never appeared. Instead, in many places the general demobilization of BKA was announced. After June 27, 1944, the German liaison staff to BKA left Minsk, the decision about a fate of individual Home Guard's units was put upon the shoulders of commanders of these units. These provided their soldiers with a choice: to leave together with Germans or stay home. According to the example, provided by the Polish-Byelorussian historian Yerzy (Yury) Turonak, merely 20 out of 700 soldiers of Baranavici BKA unit decided to follow the Germans to the West.[18]

Those armed collaborators (primarily members of Byelorussian Home Guard and of various auxiliary police units) who left Byelorussia were concentrated in East Prussia and in still occupied Poland. Their numbers are difficult to establish. According to the data of former Chief of BKA's main office major Franz (Francišak Kušal) it should be ten thousand people.[19] There existed difference of opinion between the German officials and

[17]"Abschlußbericht des Stadtkommissars Minsk über die Räumung der Stadt Minsk, 27.07.44", *BA* R 93/14.

[18]Yu. Turonak, *Belarus pad Njametskaj Akupatsyjaj* (Minsk: Belarus 1993), p. 189.

[19]Quoted *ibid*, p. 193.

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Byelorussian nationalists[20] about the ultimate fate of all these people. The leaders of Byelorussian Central Council, which perceived themselves as Byelorussian government-in-exile, wanted to see them formed into a Byelorussian legion which would take part in combat against the advancing Soviet Army. Germans, however have had other plans.

Already at the end of July 1944 concentration of auxiliary police units (*Schutzmannschaften*) which left Byelorussia to the northeast of Warsaw was ordered. These people were than formed into an "auxiliary police brigade" (*Schutzmannschaft-Brigade*). The leading role in this process was played by Sturmbannführer SS and major of "urban police" (*Schutzpolizei*) Hans Siegling, former commander of 57th auxiliary police battalion and the last SS and police leader of "White Ruthenia and Pripjet."[21] The *Schutzmannschaft-Brigade Siegling*, named after its commander, consisted of four infantry regiments and of one artillery and one cavalry subunits.[22]

Shortly after its formation Siegling's brigade attracted an attention of Heinrich Himmler. The Reichsführer SS and Chief of German police was after the abortive anti-Hitler coup of July 20, 1944, also the commander of the Reserve Army and in this capacity was responsible for supplying front with fresh units. On July 31, 1944, Himmler ordered transformation of *Schutzmannschaft-Brigade "Siegling"* into the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Russian No. 2).[23] This division was not the first consisting of non-Germans and non-"Germanic people." Whereas originally Waffen SS were perceived by Himmler as a spearhead of Aryan race and in their formation strict physical and racial criteria were applied, toward the end of World War II they lost almost completely their elite character. Heavy losses suffered by the "old," German and "Germanic" Waffen SS divisions led to significant softening of admitting criteria and to transfer

[20]On July 12, 1944, the members of the so-called Byelorussian Central Council (*Belaruskaja Central'naja Rada* or *BCR* in Byelorussian) arrived in Berlin. BCR was created in December 1943 on personal orders of acting General Commissar for White Ruthenia Curt von Gottberg as "auxiliary and advisory body" (*Hilfs- und Beratungsorgan*), although its members saw themselves no less than as a government of Byelorussia. The chief task of this body from German point of view was to mobilize the Byelorussian population for anti-partisan struggle. BCR was headed by "president" Radaslau Astrouski.

[21]Pripjet is a marshes' area encompassing south Byelorussia and northern Ukraine. During most of the Nazi occupation period it was part of Reich's Commissariat Ukraine. Siegling's biography see at: Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 69.

[22]*Ibid*., pp. 69–70.

[23]The designation "Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS" was reserved for Waffen SS units consisting of non-Germans and non-"Germanic" people. Waffen SS Division which consisted of the so-called Reich's Germans (i.e. Germans living in Germany's 1938 boundaries) were designated "SS Divisions", while those consisting either of ethnic Germans from the occupied territories or of the so-called "Germanic people" (i.e. Dutchmen, Norwegians, Danes, etc.) were designated "SS voluntary divisions" (*SS Freiwilligendivisionen*). See: G. H. Stein, *Geschichte der Waffen SS* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag 1999), pp. 269–271.

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from the recruitment based upon the voluntary basis to the outright conscription. The first unit, which in its majority consisted of the so-called "foreign nationals" (i.e., neither Germans nor "Germanics") was 13th Waffen-Mountain Division (*Waffen-Gebirgsdivision*) "Handshar" (Croatian No. 1) recruited from the Bosnian Moslems.[24]

At the same time the 30th division was not the first Waffen SS unit consisting of Soviet nationals. At the time of its formation there existed already three Baltic divisions (15th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Latvian No.1), 19th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Latvian No.2), and 20th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Estonian No.1)),[25] one Ukrainian division (14th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Galician No.1),[26] and 29th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS "RONA" (Russian No.1).[27]

[24]The designation "Croatian" is explained by the fact that during the World War II the territory of present day Bosnia-Herzegovina was part of pro-Axis "Croatian State." To the history of "Handshar" division see: G. Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division* (Atglen, PA): Schiffer Military History, 1997).

[25]See about the formation of these divisions: Stein, *Geschichte der Waffen SS*, pp. 157–161.

[26]See pretty apologetic study about this unit: Taras Hunczak, *On the Horns of a Dilemma. The Story of the Ukrainian Division Halychyna* (Lanham, MD): University Press of America, 2000).

[27]This unit was an reincarnation of the so-called Waffen assault brigade "RONA" (Waffen-Sturmbrigade "RONA") commanded by Bronislav Kaminskij. RONA is an abbreviation of *Russkaja Osvoboditelnaja Narodnaja Armija* (Russian Liberation National Army). This was formed as early as 1941 by two engineers, Ivan Voskobojnikov and Bronislav Kaminskij, both admirers of German National-Socialism and founders of dwarf "National Socialist Russian Workers Party." RONA was formed already in the fall of 1941 for the combat against the partisans in Brjansk forests (western Russia). Up to the beginning of 1942 it waged the anti-partisan struggle without any coordination with Germans. Later Voskobojnikov and Kaminskij (the former was killed under the mysterious circumstances in January 1942) organized under the aegis of German supreme command of the 2nd army the so-called "autonomous district Lokot" in Kursk-Orjol area which initially encompassed 581,000 inhabitants. Germans evaluated the whole project as a success. Not only were Kaminskij and his men able to combat partisans effectively, but the district Lokot produced enough foodstuff both to feed its own population and also to supply it to Germans. The arsenal of RONA consisted of the weapons left behind by the Soviets by their retreat in summer 1941 or of those captured from partisans. The "Liberation Army" had at its disposal allegedly even the legendary T-34 tanks. After liberation of Lokot area by Soviet army in mid-1943 RONA units were transferred to Byelorussia, where they participated in anti-partisan warfare in eastern part of the country. In summer 1944 RONA was transferred to the west and in June of the same year rechristened into Waffen Assault Brigade of SS "RONA." One month later it was renamed once again as 29th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS "RONA" (Russian No.1). In August 1944 it took part in quelling of Warsaw uprising. The multiple atrocities committed by the division's members in Warsaw were too much even for Germans. Kaminskij and several members of his staff were called to Lodz where they were executed by SS firing squad, the division was dissolved. To the Lokot district see: "Aktennotiz für den Führer bezüglich Russischer Selbstverwaltungsbezirk Lokotj, 8.1.43", *BA* R 6/18, Mikrofiche 5; "Bericht des Oberkriegsverwaltungsrates Dr. Günzel (Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Mitte) über den Selbstverwaltungsbezirk Lokot', 25.5.43", *BA* R 6/309, Mikrofiche 1. To the general history of 29th division see: Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, pp. 8–62.

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Already by the formation of Ukrainian division in 1943 some "inconveniences" occurred since this division consisted of people who only a couple of years before were described as "subhuman" (*Untermenschen*) by Nazi racial ideologues. Even at the beginning of 1944 Himmler himself deemed it necessary to call the commanders of the 14th "Galician" division to comradely relations between Germans and Ukrainians in this division.[28]

In the case of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS too Germans had difficulties to overcome the racial-ideological dogmas. The foretaste of German attitude toward their new "comrades-in-arms" the latter could get already during the division's formation in Poland. The family members of those recruited into the division were separated from them and sent to the work in Germany.[29] Although on August 3, 1944, the first officer of the Division's general staff Hauptsturmführer SS and Hauptmann (Captain),[30] Deutschbein, issued a directive about the use of the Nazi salute and of Waffen-SS ranks for non-German members of the division,[31] this did not alleviate the tension between Germans and non-Germans in the unit. The latter were constantly called "bandits" and "bolshevists," and cases of physical violence were not unknown.[32] The people who in the past participated in the "anti-partisan warfare" in Byelorussia were often used as coachmen and grooms.[33] Little wonder that already during the formation phase of the division in August 1944 the desertions became more and more frequent.[34]

Although officially the 30th Division was named Russian, its national composition was quite varied. In the 3rd company of the division's 4th regiment alone, there served 447 Byelorussians, 53 Russians, 15 Ukrainians, 63 Poles, and even three Tartars.[35] Germans, too, served in the division not only as officers but also as rank and file soldiers.[36] As can be seen

[28]See Stein, *Geschichte der Waffen SS*, p. 167.

[29]"Schreiben des Regimentsführers des Regiments 4 an die 30. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS betr. Vorfälle im letzten Quartierraum und auf dem Marsch 12.08.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/2.

[30]The officers of Waffen SS had both SS and army ranks.

[31]"Großbestimmungen und Dienstgradangleichung, ausgegeben bei Hauptsturmführer u. Hptm. Deutschbein, der Erste Generalstabsoffizier der 30. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS, 3.08.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/2.

[32]"Regimentsbefehl Nr. 4 des SS Hauptsturmführers Hauptmann und Regiments Führers an 4. Regiment, 10.8.44", *Ibid.*

[33]"Schreiben an die 7., 8. und 9 Kompanien, 14.8.1944", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/2.

[34]"Schreiben des SS-Untersturmführers u. Leutnant Kompanieführer Wüst betreffend flüchtige Waffengrenadiere, 5.08.44", "Schreiben des Rev.-Hauptmanns und Gerichtsoffiziers bei Abt. III Brigade Siegling an die Regte 1–4., Artillerie-Reiter und Ausbildungsabteilung betreffend Fahndung nach entwichenen Schutzmänner, 30.7.44", *BA*-MA RS 3–30/2.

[35]"Schreiben des Kommandeurs des III/Rgt. 4 betreffend Volkszugehörigkeit der Fv., 8.8.44", *Ibid.*

[36]"SS-Grenadier Adolf Geyers Personalblatt", *Ibid.*

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from the 4th regiment's "regiment's order" the company commanders in the division were as a rule German officers who received the so-called "foreign" (*fremdvölkische*) officers as assistants.[37] Although Poles constituted a high percentage in the division, the suspicious attitude toward them remained intact during the whole period of the division's existence. Such attitude stemmed not only from the fact that during the division's stay in Poland some Polish officers made contacts to the Polish *Armija Krajowa* units as is maintained by German researcher Rolf Michaelis,[38] but also from the traditional mistrust, even hostility on the part of German authorities toward the Poles, which expressed themselves in various forms already during German occupation of Byelorussia. In November 1944, when the division had already left Poland and found itself in France, the Division's commander Obersturmbannführer *SS,* Siegling, issued an order demanding submitting the lists of names of all soldiers and NCOs of Polish origin as well as of Byelorussians "who registered themselves as Poles".[39]

The equipment of the division with weapons as well as supplies of food and clothes left much to be desired and this was the situation during the entire period of the unit's existence. At no point the division had heavy armor at its disposal. The majority of weapons of division's soldiers were captured ones. In September 1944, the 2nd company of the 77th division's regiment had at its disposal between 117 and 319 French and only 35 German rifles; and 119 English and four Russian automatic weapons vs. three of German origin.[40] At the beginning of August 1944 the commander of the 3rd company of the 61st Ukrainian *schuma* "F" battalion (this unit was a part of the division) reported a lack of 200 sets of underwear, 100 overcoats, and 200 pairs of socks.[41] The division's soldiers were former *schumas* and upon entering the division they continued to perform their duties in *Schutzmannschaften* uniform. The members of 30th division merely wore black collars with double cross on the right side as a mark of their belonging to 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division.

The poor equipment of the 30th Division and the constant abuses by the German personnel led to uninterrupted waves of desertions of the

[37]"Regiments-Befehl Nr. 5 für Regiment 4 der 30. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, 11.8.44", *Ibid.*

[38]Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 75.

[39]"Schreiben des Divisionskommandeur SS-Obersturmbannführer Siegling betreffend fremdvölkische polnischer Volkszugehörigkeit, 17.11.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/3.

[40]"Waffenausstattung des Russ. Btl. 654, II/Waffen-Grenadier Rgm. SS 77 (russ. Nr.6), 30. Waff. Gren. Div. d. SS (russ. Nr. 2), 27.9.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/4.

[41]"Schreiben des Regimentsführers des Regiment 4 an 30. Waffen-Grenadier Division betr. Vorfälle im letzten Quartierraum und auf dem Marsch, 12.08.44", "Meldung des Kompaniechefs der 3. Komp. Ukr. Schutzm. F. Batl. 61", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/2.

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non-German members of the Division mostly to Armija Krajowa units. In July and August of 1944 the division's commanders at various levels reported numerous cases of desertions of former auxiliary policemen with or without weapons.[42] These desertions to the Polish Home Army brought about a decision of German military command already at the beginning of August 1944 to transfer the division to East Prussia.[43] The division's stay there did not last long, however, as in the course of a few weeks the 30th Division was transferred to France to fight the Résistance movement there as well as to cover the retreat of German 19th Army from the South France.

THE 30TH WAFFEN-GRENADIER DIVISION OF SS IN FRANCE AND ALSACE

On August 15, 1944, the 7th US Army landed in southern France. A few days later began the retreat of German 19th Army from the area. This retreat was accompanied by attacks of French partisans upon German soldiers, military objects and supply lines. The newly appointed German Supreme Commander "West" Walter Model demanded additional troops to secure the rear of the 19th Army. Since 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS consisted of experienced "partisan-hunters," Himmler ordered immediate transfer of this division to France.[44] Both for the members of the division as well as for the Byelorussian nationalists in Berlin, who hoped to participate in the fight against the advanced Soviet forces, transferring of the division to the West was a kind of a blow in the face. It also contradicted the oath the division's members took in Poland which spoke of the "fight against the Bolshevist enemies".[45] Little wonder that division's moral that already during a stay in Poland left much to be desired sunk still deeper. Already on August 27, 1944, merely a couple of days after the arrival of first parts of the division in France, the 2nd battalions of both 1st and 2nd regiments mutinied, killed German framework personnel, and deserted to "Maquis."[46] On the next day Model had directed a complaint to the SS leading office: "30th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division (sic!)

[42]"Schreiben des SS-Untersturmführer u. Leutnant Komapnieführer Wüst betreffend flüchtige Waffengrenadiere, 5.08.44",; "Schreiben des Rev.-Hauptmanns und Gerichtsoffiziers bei Abt. III Brigade Siegling an die Regte 1–4., Artillerie-Reiter und Ausbildungsabteilung betreffend Fahndung nach etwichenen Schutzmänner, 30.7.44", "Schreiben des Kompanieführers der 12. Komapnie III/Regt. 4 betreffend flüchtige Waffengrenadiere, 29.08.44", alle in *BA*-MA RS 3–30/2.

[43]Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 76.

[44]*Ibid*., p. 78.

[45]The entire text of the oath is quoted by Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 73.

[46]*Ibid*., p. 81.

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runs over in battalions (*battaillonsweise*) to the bands, kills German officers, completely unreliable. Division should be disarmed. The immediate shipping off into the Reich for work assignment is necessary."[47]

This happened indeed at the middle of September 1944 when the main bulk of the division was transferred to Alsace, then still under the control of the Third Reich. Here the division underwent a reformation. All "useless and unreliable elements" (according to the division's commander, Siegling) were removed from the division and transferred to the transport commanding office (*Transportkommandantur*) of Karlsruhe from where they were transferred later to the building of the so-called Western Wall. The remaining 6,200 men were reorganized into: division's staff; two infantry regiments with three battalions each; reconnaissance unit with three cavalry squadrons; armored infantry (Panzer-Grenadier) unit with one armored infantry and one armored scout company; artillery unit with two batteries of 12.2 cm field howitzers and a missile battery; pioneer company; mixed intelligence company; field reserve battalion with one gunmen' and one heavy company; and logistic service.[48] On October 19, 1944, the division was reorganized once again on the orders from SS main leading office. The third infantry regiment was created, while the exiting two were cut to two battalions each. The regiments were also newly numbered, receiving the numbers from 75 to 77 with the designation "Russian 4 to 6" in brackets.[49]

Most of the division's stay in Alsace was dedicated to raising the moral of the troops as well as to turning the division into the more or less combatable unit. On September 15, 1944, the chief of staff of the 3rd battalion of the 1st regiment, Muravjov, issued an order No. 1 in Russian. This order aimed at raising the morale of the troops and at putting a stop to desertions. The order spoke of "our victory" (less than a year before the collapse of the Third Reich) and informed the grenadiers that those who had deserted to the partisans in France were ultimately transferred to the Soviets.[50] However, as may be deduced from Muravjov's next orders the moral and discipline in the division remained very low. An especially heavy problem was drunkenness widespread among the division's soldiers, which led to the violence against the own commanders. An undated order No. 14, issued by the same Muravjov mentions a case in which two drunken members of 2nd company of the 1st regiment's 3rd battalion stole

[47]Quoted *Ibid.*

[48]*Ibid*., p. 83.

[49]*Ibid*., p. 86. Actually the last reorganization should be dated with the end of September 1944 as shown by the report regarding the weapon equipment of the division. See: "Waffenausstattung des Russ. Btl. 654, II/Waffen-Grenadier Rgm. SS 77 (russ. Nr.6), 30. Waff. Gren. Div. d. SS (russ. Nr. 2), 27.9.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/4.

[50]"Order no. 1 of Muravjov" (in Russian), *BA-MA* RS 3–30/8.

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the weapons and tried to shoot their company commander but were disarmed. To prevent such occurrences in the future Muravjov prohibited by the same order alcohol consume in the unit, threatening the offenders with sending them off to concentration camps for disobedience.[51]

To raise and maintain moral and discipline in the division the method of "stick and carrot" was used. Those grenadiers who during the division's short stay in France excelled themselves in "anti-partisan warfare" were awarded the "Bravery Award for the Representatives of Eastern People" (*Tapferkeitsauszeichnung für Angehörige der Ostvölker*).[52] At the same time "the agitators" could be punished by rank lowering (for officers and NCOs) or by sending to work service or even to a concentration camp.[53] The lectures about the current situation made by both German and non-German division's members too were supposed to serve raising the moral. Since many grenadiers still did not came to terms with the fact of being transferred to the West and did not have too big a grudge against the Western Allies, the stress in these lectures was put upon exposing "the intimate connection between liberal and Bolshevist concepts (*Weltanschauung*)"[54] as well as upon describing "the appalling" conditions in those territories liberated by the Allied forces.[55] Notwithstanding the difficult military situation of Germany at this time grenadiers were drummed in with the slogans about the Germany's final victory that should be achieved by using the "wonder weapons" (*Wunderwaffen*).[56]

Notwithstanding all the propaganda the moral of 30th Waffen-Grenadier division remained extremely low and even the division's commanding officers could not conceal this fact. The orders of Muravjov, stored today in the military archive in German Freiburg im Breisgau, depict truly lamentable conditions reigning in the division. The soldiers wore filthy clothes lacking buttons, and had no change of underwear. Poor supplies of food led to widespread occurrences of buying, begging, and stealing food in the villages surrounding stationing places; and the attempts to forestall these occurrences with numerous orders remained futile.[57]

[51]See "Order no. 14 to the riflemen battalion 'Muravjov' (in Russian), undated", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/6.

[52]"Divisionsbefehl Nr. 9, 4.10.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/7.

[53]"Schreiben des Stab. Btl. Kdr. Murawjev betreffend Überführung zum Arbeitseinsatz, 16.10.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/5.

[54]"WE-Hinweis Nr. 16. 'Warum bekämpft uns Amerika?', 9.10.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/1.

[55]WE-Hinweis Nr. 7–30. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (russ. Nr. 2) 'Warum wir siegen werden', 23.9.44, *BA-MA* RS 3–30/1.

[56]*Ibid.*

[57]See: "Orders no.16 (undated), no. 17 (2.11.44), no. 19 (8.11.44), no. 23 (undated) to the riflemen battalion 'Muravjov'" (all in Russian), *Ibid.*

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The weapon equipment of the division too remained inadequate. Although officially the division had an artillery and armored infantry units, in reality it had practically no heavy weapons at its disposal. The division's soldiers were armed mostly with captured French, English, and Russian pieces.[58] Although, the problems with supplies were provided as official cause for division's poor weapons' and provision's supply, it may be at least supposed that here once again the desire to get "maximum collaboration for minimum price" as well as the traditional mistrust toward the "Eastern people" played a significant role.

AGAINST THE WESTERN ALLIES

The 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS remained in the German rear until the end of October 1944. During this stay the lectures mentioned above were alternated with shooting, marching, and reconnaissance exercises. On October 2, 1944, the 1st and parts of the 4th company of the 1st regiment's 3rd battalion were put on alert receiving orders to eliminate the Allied landing forces that intended to capture the Rhine, Rhone and Calmar bridges on German-Dutch and German-French borders.[59]

On October 24, 1944, when Allied troops reached Alsace, the commanders of German Army Group "G" operating in southern France reminded of the 30th division as Germans could use any fresh and to a certain extent armed troops found in the area. The commanders of the Army Group asked the Supreme Commander "West" to subordinate the division to the Group. In mid-November 1944, the situation of German troops in southern France became strained after the French troops of General Lattre de Tassigny succeeded in a short time to advance through the so-called Burgundian Gates almost to the Swiss border.

When the commander of 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division, Siegling, offered his unit as a support for the 19th German Army, the commanders of the latter decided that

> **"The front-line use (*Fronteinsatz*) of the division that once was removed from a combat because of mutiny should be refused. Only the division's artillery unit should be allocated to the Belfort area" and that "the mission of the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division should be…cordoning off duties in the depth [of German lines]."[60]**

[58]"Waffenausstattung des russ. Btl. 654, II./Waffen-Grenadier Rgm. SS 77 (russ. Nr. 6), 30. Waff. Gren. Div.d. SS (russ. Nr.2), 27.9.44", *BA-MA* RS 3–30/4.

[59]"Fighting order no. 1 of commander of the staff battalion 'Muravjov', 2.10.44" (in Russian), *BA-MA* RS 3–30/6. The area these units were supposed to hold stretched from the road crossings Duerenzen, Balzen-Heim, Kuen-Heim, and to the north up to the Calmar canal and to the east up to the canals crossing through the Rhine and the Rhone.

[60]Quoted in Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 90.

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In other words, the division was supposed to be used solely for the defensive duties in German rear.

On November 19, when French troops reached Rhine, Himmler allowed the use of the 30th division as "security force at the Altkirch bolt."[61] Ultimately the division was subordinated to German LXIIIrd corps. The 76th regiment (Russian No. 5) "occupied the line Dammerkirch-Altkirch-Hirtzbach" whereas the 75th regiment (Russian No. 4) was positioned "along the Rhine-Rhone canal between Montreux-Chateau and Wolfersdorf."[62]

Although Model himself firmly insisted that the division should by no means participate in the offensive activities, in reality the 76th Waffen-Grenadier regiment took part in German counter-attack against Friesen-Überstraß.[63] Moreover, the 30th division was ordered by the Supreme Command of Army Group "G" to provide daily two "hunting teams" (*Jagdkommandos*) armed with bazookas and pressure mines for disturbing the Allied supply lines in the Courtelevant-Ferette-Muesprach-Altkirch area.[64] Ultimately, the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division took part on the attack of combat group (*Kampfgruppe*) of General of Artillery Loch from the area west of Altkirch in southwestern direction (began on November 22, 1944) in which course 41 tanks of French 1st armored division were destroyed, 6 of them by the soldiers of the division. The war diary of Supreme Command "West" even have praised the "bravery and steadfastness" of the soldiers of 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS. But already on November 23, 1944, the French counterattacked and pushed the parts of the division back.[65]

The fact that the division members were able to meet the French tanks and heavy artillery only with carbines, machine guns, bazookas, and only five 12.2 cm field howitzers depressed significantly the moral of the grenadiers. Little wonder that already on November 26 the war diary of German 19th Army reported panic reigning among the soldiers of the 30th division: "The Russians are running out of their positions without firing a shot by the appearance of the tanks and are fighting partly against us."[66] After the days of heavy fighting, even Siegling came to the conclusion that his division "is not capable of action anymore."[67]

[61] Quoted *ibid*, p. 91.
[62] *Ibid*., p. 92.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 92f.
[65] *Ibid*, p. 94.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 95.
[67] *Ibid*.

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The division was transferred to Germany where it was disbanded on December 31, 1944. Part of the grenadiers were distributed between other troops,[68] while the remaining Byelorussian grenadiers and German framework personnel were formed into a new unit, named Waffen-Grenadier Brigade of SS (Byelorussian No. 1) consisting of one infantry regiment, one reconnaissance squadron, one armored and one field reserve company.[69] The brigade never saw action and remained in the words of Yerzy Turonak merely a "paper unit".[70]

On March 9, 1945 the brigade was renamed into the 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Byelorussian No. 1),[71] but at the beginning of April it was disbanded.[72] Parts of the division still remained at the training camp Grafenwöhr in Wurttemberg, when this was overridden by units of Third US Army. The former Waffen-Grenadiers were transferred to the POW camp near Regensburg in Bavaria. Since many of them were born in Western Byelorussia, which up to September 1939 belonged to Poland, they posed as Poles to avoid the extradition to the Soviet Union. After their staying in displaced person's camps many of them succeeded in getting to the western countries where they could profit from the Cold War.[73]

SUMMARY

The 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS (Russian No. 2) represents the last chapter in the history of military-police collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II. It is impossible to understand the history and especially the situation inside this unit outside the general context of German occupying policies in Byelorussia. The relations between German "framework personnel" and the so-called "foreign" grenadiers were anything but comradely. The tenet "*Herrenvolk* (nation of lords) vs. *Untermenschen* (subhuman)" which already during an occupation period was implemented in treatment of local collaborators by German authorities in East, as well as traditional German mistrust toward the "eastern people," was

[68]They came mainly to 25th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS "Hunyadi" (Hungarian No. 1) and 26th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS "Hungaria" (Hungarian No. 2). The German framework personnel came to the newly formed 38th SS Grenadier Division "Niebelungen". *Ibid*, p. 98, A. J. Munoz, *Forgotten Legions* (Boulder, (CO): Paladin Press, 1991), pp. 278–279.

[69]Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 98.

[70]Turonak, *Belarus' pad njameckaj Akupacyjaj*, p. 194.

[71]Whereas for Antonio Munoz the reason for this renaming is unclear, Rolf Michaelis assumes that it was supposed to deceive the Allied intelligence. See: Munoz, *Forgotten Legions*, p. 279, Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 98.

[72]Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 99.

[73]See Loftus, *The Belarus Secret* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

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transferred also upon the 30th division.[74] Special mistrust was reserved hereby for the Polish Waffen-Grenadiers. This mistrust was not or was not caused only by the fact that at the division's stage of formation Polish division's members contacted Polish *Armija Krajowa*, as it is maintained by Rolf Michaelis, but it was a result of traditional mistrust toward the Poles on the part of German authorities which expressed itself already during the Nazi occupation of Byelorussia.

The provision and equipment of the division shows that even at the point when Third Reich was only one year away of its crumbling, the tenet "maximal collaboration for minimal price" remained unaltered. The members of 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS similarly to members of other units formed during the closing phase of World War II, were seen by the Germans in the first place as "cannon fodder" that were supposed to patch the crumbling defenses of the Third Reich. Little wonder that such a perception and such treatment led to low moral and constant desertions, which in their turn only raised further the suspicious attitude on the part of German authorities.

Generally, the history of 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of SS reflects the German perception of local collaboration in occupied countries during World War II. It represented itself as a mixture of racially ideological dogmatism and utilitarianism.

[74] Rolf Michaelis at the other hand sees in the "abuses and corporal punishments" of "foreign" division's members on the part of German personnel solely "the helplessness against the situation" in which the former had no motivation to fight at the German side. See Michaelis, *Russen in der Waffen-SS*, p. 77. Hereby Michaelis takes the history of the division off the general context of collaboration in Byelorussia between the years 1941–1944 and its perception on the part of German authorities. See my still unpublished PhD dissertation: L. Rein, *Collaboration in Byelorussia and Its Place in German Occupation Policies (1941–1944)* (Haifa, 2003).

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